

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

28 March 2008

Europe

Renault workers in Romania strike over pay

On March 24, auto workers employed by Renault at a plant in Romania walked off the job in a dispute over pay. Workers at the Dacia factory in Pitesti, near the capital Bucharest, are demanding a pay increase of up to 65 percent. Management at the plant has offered to pay an increase of 19 percent. According to the union at the plant, average monthly pay is about US\$450.

The plant employs 13,000 workers, and the union says 80 percent of those participated in the action.

On March 27, the workers began the fourth day of their strike following a failure in negotiations between the union and management the previous day. Following the talks, union official Ion Iordache said, "The management put forward a new proposal, namely a monthly rise of 130 lei [€35, US\$55] from January, followed by a second rise of 26 lei a month from September. We didn't accept this ridiculous offer and will continue with the strike."

According to news reports, more than 6,000 workers at the plant are to demonstrate March 27 in a protest organised by the National Unions Block. TV reports have stated that each day of the industrial action has resulted in losses of €10 million for Renault.

The company is planning to begin production at other locations around the world including Russia, India, Brazil, Morocco, Colombia and Iran, and has warned that it will shift production from Romania if necessary. According to reports, the average monthly pay at the Russian AvtoVAZ car plant in Togliatti is only about US\$200. Last month, Renault agreed to a production deal with AvtoVAZ, under which it can potentially produce more than 1 million cars a year.

Last year, Renault produced two thirds of all its Logan models worldwide at the Dacia plant. The company began producing cars at the plant in 2004.

Polish container-loading employees strike at Gdansk terminal

Workers employed by the Baltic Container Terminal (BCT) in Gdansk, Poland, began industrial action on March 20 in a pay dispute. The action entered its sixth day on March 26.

The dispute involves some 500 workers who are demanding a pay rise of 400 zlotys a month. Management at BCT has offered less than 200 zlotys. BCT was opened in 1979 and is Poland's biggest container-reloading facility.

Public sector workers in northern Cyprus strike in budget and wage dispute

On March 20, members of five public sector trade unions in northern Cyprus staged industrial action to protest delays in negotiations over the 2008 financial budget. The unions are also calling for wage increases for their members.

The strike included action by teachers and affected all state schools throughout the region. A demonstration was also held in the capital, as protesters marched to Ataturk Square in northern Nicosia.

Workers at auto plant in France strike in pay dispute

Three hundred workers at an auto plant in Meung-sur-Loire, France, continued strike action last week in pursuit of a pay increase. The stoppage began on March 14 with workers calling for a pay increase of €50. They are employed by Jabil Circuit Inc., which bought the plant in 2002.

The plant employs a total of 540 workers, including 40 temporary workers.

Train drivers at SWT in England set to hold four-day strike

Drivers employed by South West Trains (SWT) in England are set to strike from midnight on March 31 to April 3. The drivers are members of the ASLEF trade union and voted by a margin of 73 percent for industrial action.

The dispute is over pay and working hours, and the union authorised a strike after negotiations failed to

reach agreement last week. SWT has offered a pay increase of 4.5 percent.

The planned four-day strike would have a widespread impact and affect hundreds of thousands of passengers who use SWT's services across the south of England and into London's Waterloo station.

Africa

Kenyan airport workers plan strike over pay and allowances

Kenyan airport workers are threatening strike action next month unless the government increases their salaries and allowances. The Kenya Civil Aviation and Allied Workers Union (KCAAWU) gave notice of its intention to strike unless its demands are addressed by March 31.

The secretary general of the KCAAWU accused the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority of going back on an earlier agreement that provided for increases in salaries and allowances.

Strike leaders suspended at Zambian copper smelter

Around 50 workers out of a total of 500 at the Chinese-owned Chambishi Copper Smelter (CCS) have been suspended on the grounds that they were "ringleaders" in the strike earlier this month, during which riots were alleged to have taken place and some company property was damaged.

The National Union of Miners and Allied Workers (NUMAW) has resumed negotiations with management over pay and conditions. In an earlier dispute in January, the workers accused the joint Chinese-Zambian management of lack of sensitivity and of intimidating them when they raised complaints. They complained that they were being paid wages as low as US\$52 a month.

The union president, Mundia Sikufele, was reported by the *Times* of Zambia as saying that the union was happy that the other workers had been reinstated, while criticising those who took matters into their own hands. "Let the workers realise that there is a union in place, through which labour matters should be handled," he said.

The Chambishi Copper Smelter is the first of 50 Chinese companies said to be planning to invest more than US\$800 million in a tax-free zone in Zambia within the next five years.

Algerian medical workers strike against new laws

On March 16, Algerian medical workers began a three-day strike to oppose new civil service laws that will affect their work and salary levels.

The strike went ahead despite the administrative chamber of the Court of Algiers issuing an order against the action. According to reports, around 95 percent of medical assistants took part in the strike.

The news publication *Magharebia* interviewed 51-year-old Mustapha Belkhalfa, a medical assistant. He stated that his monthly income (just over 24,000 dinars, or US\$369) is not sufficient to support his wife and two children. The Algerian Medical Assistants' Union (SAP) says that there are 20 patients on average for each nurse employed, while the regulations stipulate a ratio of 4:1.

Another issue causing discontent is that Algerian midwives are held personally responsible if either a baby or its mother dies, and many of the 9,500 practicing midwives have been prosecuted.



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